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Tao of the brush

Wei Guangjun and Wang Yi won praise last year with their impressive exhibition of Tao-inspired paintings at Prince Kung's Mansion.

Now the exhibition is up for auction.

The pair have been hailed for their brushwork that fuses the techniques of traditional and modern Chinese ink art.

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媒体监督热线: +86 (010) 6590 2515, hr@beijingtoday.com.cn

Industrial breakup may be answer to income gap

By ZHAO HONGYI
Beijing Today Staff

More than half of China's GDP is generated by only 35 cities, with Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou accounting for 3.8 percent, 3.43 percent and 2.71 percent respectively.

The shocking fact was rendered with painful clarity in a recent map by *Foreign Policy* that has been making its way around the Internet this week.

Set in orange and white, the map tells the other side of the China miracle – a side driven by selfishness and discrimination and which has propelled the country to dangerous levels of income disparity.

But as hundreds of Beijing's schools and businesses are broken up and relocated to Hebei Province, the government may be trying to rectify a shortcoming that has long been attributed to "national character."

Ornamented in fool's gold

One need only drive 30 minutes in any direction from downtown Beijing to find the face of poverty: entire villages exist on the margins while praying to the regional government for a life-saving subsidy.

It's a pattern of unequal development mirrored in Shanghai and Guangzhou, as well as inland economic powerhouses like Chongqing and Wuhan.

Three decades of breakneck development have turned China into the world's second largest economic power, and many analysts believe it will overtake the US during the next 20 years.

China similarity to the US in GDP distribution is only skin deep.

While the 50 percent of the US GDP comes from traditional industrial and trade bases such as New England, California, Detroit, Chicago and Miami, the rest of the country is not suffering in abject poverty.

In the Chinese interior, even the most educated workers can scarcely earn more than \$200 per month. Faced with such a low starting point, graduates have no incentive to return home.

Brazil faced a similar imbalance in the 1960s and 1970s that caused its economic engines to grind to a halt: in Indonesia and Argentina, it resulted in mass uprisings.

No culture of sharing

But for China, the imbalance may have to do with a lack of resources than a lack of culture.

The tendency to grip onto one's treasure and hide from the world is in China's blood, says Wang Jun, a professor of social science at Peking University.

When China first began its economic reforms in the early 1980s, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou and Xiamen were selected as pilot cities. The decision cast a



Beijing's prosperous central business district



A classroom in a Henan Province village

CFP Photos

shadow over all of economic reform since.

Rather than develop in their own way, China's cities have blindly copied the isolated development patterns of these boom towns that were crafted to prevent wealth from flowing back out of the cities.

That may have worked in the 1980s, but as the government slashes away more, and more of its Communist-era safety nets, the poor are being left behind. In mass.

It's hard to see a future for rural China.

Since the nationally planned economy of the Maoist era, the countryside has been used as a tool for supporting cities rather than given its own path, Wang says.

"The poor are unfamiliar with the outside world and are kept afraid of reaching out," Wang says, "They are never educated

to have a passion to change their lives."

Wang was born to an impoverished family in Jiangsu Province. He enrolled in Peking University in the early 1980s and spent the next 30 years working toward professor status.

"In the end, my achievement only benefited myself. I've never found a way to help others or inspire in them the same passion," he says.

New road to reform

The income disparity may be worsening but it was never unanticipated.

In the late 1990s, Premier Zhu Rongji attempted to spur development in the vast western interior. His government

spent heavily to install rail routes into the hinterland.

Premier Wen Jiabao dismantled all agricultural taxes on China's farmers in 2002, allowing them to develop any kind of business except where expressly forbidden by law.

But removing restraints is not the same as creating opportunities, Wang said.

"Rural people lack the courage to pursue something. They truly believe they are destined to be forgotten forever," he said.

The attitude makes Xi Jinping's visits to the fishermen of Guangdong Province or the farmers of the Taihang Mountain with promises of narrowing the development gap seem painfully impotent.

But there may be hope in a new government program to offload development onto the nation's third-tier cities.

The first phase underway in Beijing would move several national universities and major wholesale markets to Baoding, Langfang, Tangshan and Chengde, the county capitals of Hebei Province. It is also bidding to make Beijing the host of the 2024 Winter Olympic Games – to be held in Zhangjiakou, Hebei Province.

"Beijing appears to be trying to lead by example – to teach other Chinese cities how to share with their neighbors," Wang said.

"In general, the central government is on the right track. But it will be a difficult road," said Zhao Xijun, an economist at Renmin University.

"It will take time for the poor to realize it is their own responsibility to change their fates instead of waiting for direct government relief that will never come," he said.

Lost dictionary project emerges, forgotten for 38 years



Che Hongcai spent 34 years building the world's first Chinese-Pashto dictionary: even when the government forgot it asked for one.

BQB Photo

A receptionist at the Wangfujing Branch of China's Commercial Publishing House got the surprise of her life when an old man walked in with a several-thousand-page handwritten manuscript.

At 76-years-old, Che Hongcai had only one thing to say:

"I'm finished."

In his hands was the first ever Pashto-Chinese dictionary, a project commissioned, re-commissioned and eventually lost by the State Council.

By ZHAO HONGYI
Beijing Today Staff

It all began in 1975. Although Mao Zedong was still alive, Deng Xiaoping had effectively gained control of the government, the Party and the military.

In a moment foreshadowing Deng's famous reforms of the 1980s, the State Council called a national meeting in Guangzhou to discuss the creation of 160 foreign-language dictionaries that would serve the nation during its coming decades of expansion.

At the time, dictionaries between Chinese and the world's languages were very few and many languages had no competent speakers in China.

After polling several schools, Che Hongcai was found to be the only professor especially skilled at the Pashto language of Afghanistan.

Ultimately, only 70 percent of the dictionaries ordered ever saw publication during the 1980s. Most simply fell through the cracks and were forgotten as roles changed and professors passed away.

That Che persevered – unsupervised – for 34 years stunned Zhang Wenying, editor-in-chief of the Commercial Publishing House. It took Zhang two years of research

to unearth the forgotten dictionary program and arrange for the publication of Che's work.

Road to Afghanistan

"I enrolled at the Beijing Institute of Foreign Languages, now the Beijing University of Foreign Culture and Studies, in 1957 to study English," Che said.

During his third year at the school, Che and his classmates were reassigned to study less spoken languages that would enrich the cultural capacity of the school's language department.

Che was sent to Kabul, Afghanistan for a four-year exchange program at the Cultural Institute of Kabul University.

His task, the Pashto language, was exceptionally complicated.

Its speakers, the Pashtun people, trace their origin to the ancient region of Bactria, a land influenced by diverse faiths such as Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and modern day Islam. Furthermore, the language was a frequent target of radical reform under the country's unstable political leadership.

"When I returned, I was assigned to teach Pashto at the newly founded Beijing Broadcasting Institute. Today it's known as Communication University of China," Che said. Like many of his classmates, he

was called to attend the 1975 meeting in Guangzhou.

Che returned to the school with instructions to work on a Pashto dictionary. Although he worked seriously on the task for the next two years, he eventually left the school to begin a career at CRI (China Radio International) after Mao Zedong's death.

Seeing the Pashto-Chinese dictionary project unattended and the school without any Pashto speakers, the Commercial Publishing House asked CRI's Pashto "division" for help – a move that put them back in contact with Che, the division's only member.

After some urging, Che accepted the project a second time and was assigned back to the school. The institute provided him two assistants: Zhang Min, his roommate from Kabul, and Song Qiangmin, a former student.

Che, Zhang and Song worked hard to create more than 100,000 index cards containing Chinese and Pashto terms sorted by topic. However, their work was repeatedly interrupted by another reassignment.

In 1980, Che was moved to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an analyst of Middle East policy. Four years later, he was pulled back to the university to

compile textbooks for the school's new Department of International Media.

Song ultimately moved abroad to the US, leaving Che and Zhang to work on the dictionary through the 1990s.

Che retired in the mid-1990s and spent much of the last decade revising drafts of his dictionary with the aid of modern Pashto translation software.

Reflecting on a life of service

"In my generation, we were never free to choose our own profession. Our tasks were assigned entirely at the whim of the government," Che said.

After the arrival of the 1990s, most of the old government-assigned tasks were abandoned.

"Everyone was busy with their own work, and our assignments were forgotten by all," Zhang said.

Cui Yan, chief of the Commercial Publishing House's Foreign Language Section, blames the neglect on the size of the team.

"With only several professors assigned to the task, it was each to forget about the group," Cui said. "The story of this dictionary is really the story of China's political changes and its shift toward self-determination."

For their work, Cui and Zhang will be paid 80 yuan per 1,000 words. Their 2-million-word Pashto dictionary is due out during the second half of 2014.



Nature of human beings



Joy



Beijing, Beijing!



Dawn of Humanity

Photos by Zhao Hongyi

Spirit of man in i 'papercuts'

By ZHAO HONGYI

Beijing Today Staff

In his latest series of mixed media works, Ren Rong seeks the freedom to express and glorify the human body's relationship with nature.

Titled "Freedom of the Heart," the exhibition is heavily influenced by Han Dynasty stone carvings and Taoist philosophy, especially the religion's famous appreciation for the relationship between man and nature.

Ren was born in Nanjing in 1960 and studied at the Art College of Nanjing. Today he lives and teaches in Dusseldorf, Germany.

His art draws on a childhood spent with his grandmother on Shandong's Jiaodong Peninsula, where he swam in the rivers and learned folk crafts such as papercutting.

Ren's mixed media creations bring together traditional papercuts, iron and stainless steel to express the potential of the human form. His men and women, drawn with simple lines, seem to burst with natural energy.

He also uses many historical photos, comic books and political portraits to provide a backdrop for his art and make it more accessible to foreign viewers.

Recently, he has been incorporating sound into his mixed media. One of the pieces on exhibit includes a pair of drumsticks that viewers can use to "play" his iron and steel cuttings.

Through his choice of materials, Ren attempts to show that man is a "mixed" creature who cannot avoid the laws of nature no matter how far he tries to bend them.

As a professor at the Dusseldorf Academy of Arts, Ren has been active in art markets in Germany and Asia. His current exhibition is curated by Walter Smerling, a professor at the academy and director of the Kuppersmuhle Museum for Modern Art.

"Ren has integrated Western elements into his thought process. His current work stands at the crossroads of Eastern and Western cultures," Smerling said.

Asian Art Center

Where: 2 Jiuxianqiao Lu, Chaoyang District

When: Through April 30 (closed Mondays)

Tel: 5978 9709

Web: asiaartcenter.org



Enjoy

iron and steel



Taoist-inspired art up for joint auction

By **ZHAO HONGYI**
Beijing Today Staff

Artists Wei Guangjun and Wang Yi are preparing to auction their collected ink paintings that were exhibited last year at Prince Kung's Mansion.

The works show sweeping lines and imaginative landscapes derived from Taoist philosophy.

Wei Guangjun

Wei Guangjun was born in Xinyang, Henan Province 1964 and studied ink painting at the Chinese Institute of Fine Arts. Since graduating, he has been working as a grassroots artist.

Wei's poems and natural scenery show a Taoist preference for hiding from the chaos and troubles of the human world and follow the spirit of Zhang Daqian, an esteemed painter of the mid-1900s.

Each painting is dominated by yellow, blue and black, fusing the colors and styles of traditional and modern ink painting.

His natural paintings and handwriting have been considered high-class art, with most pieces selling for of 50,000 yuan.

Though his works show the Taoist preference for detachment, Wei has been incredibly active in the art market.

He is currently a professor at Peking University and a staff painter at the National Academy of Traditional Painters. He is also a member of the Academy of Chinese Artists

Wang Yi

Born in Donghai, Jiangsu Province in 1960, Wang Yi studied traditional sketching and figure painting at the Xi'an Academy of Traditional Art.

His recent work focuses on sketches of notable historic figures and people engaged in daily life. Most of his art is inspired by the stories behind the figures.

In his Easy Life series, Wang paints a drunk or dreaming monk as he flies through the sky and crashes into the ground. His art aims to show that many of the most beautiful dreams are ultimately impossible.

Wang is a painter in residence at the Chang'an Academy of Paintings and a professor of traditional painting at Xi'an Jiaotong University.

His works have been especially popular in the market, with pieces selling for as much as 700,000 yuan.

Prince Kung's Mansion

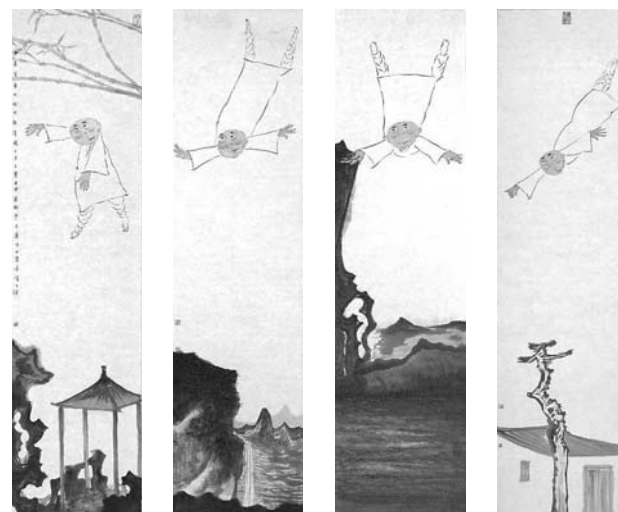
Where: Qianhai Xi Jie, Xicheng District

When: April 15, 2014

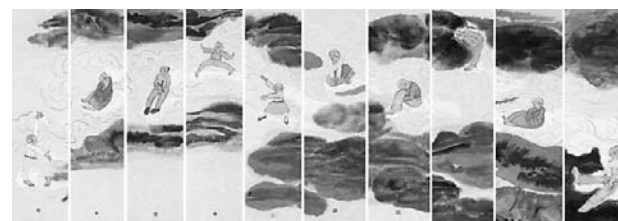
Tel: 8328 8149



Walking the Mountain Road



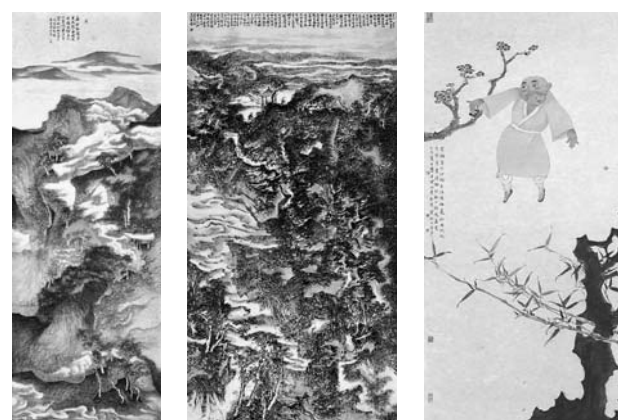
Joyful Wanderings



Dreaming Back to Wei and Jin



Drunk in Tao Dream



Mountains at Morning and Sunset

Annoying Spring

Photos provided by Prince Kung's Mansion Gallery

Rage against 'dancing grannies' limited to the south

By DIAO DIAO
Beijing Today Intern

Salsa and square dancing are the latest fads among China's infamous legions of "dancing grannies." But in spite of its popularity as a cheap option for exercise and weight loss, the blasting music has drawn the ire of workers all over the country.



Photos by CFP

Residents of Jiangmen, Guangdong Province seem to have lost their patience for outdoor dancers, the Nanfang Daily reported in February.

"The noisy spectacle satisfies the minority by sacrificing the peace of the majority," said member of the Municipal Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference surnamed Zheng.

Zheng was one of several to bemoan the country's dancing grannies at the National Party Congress earlier this year. It's a phenomenon neither the police nor government has been able to rein in or regulate.

For workers seeking rest, the cacophony of different dancing groups blasting their songs in the same square makes sleep impossible. The crowds have also been cited for interfering with public transportation.

In Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, more than 600 residents of a community pooled their money to buy a massive, 26,000-yuan subwoofer to "fight back" against the dancers. They supported their speaker by blasting trumpets, car alarms and police sirens to push the noise levels past 93 decibels and drive the dancers out.

It didn't work.

Such clashes have been mostly confined to southern China, where buildings are short and positioned comparatively close to neighborhood squares.

In Beijing, dancers have more responsibly confined their activities to public parks and major plazas.

Although they are popularly called the "dancing grannies," Beijing public dance groups draw participants from a broad range of ages.

Among the more popular groups

is one that meets at the south gate of Zizhuyuan every evening at 7 pm to study folk dancing with Wang Xiaojing, an amateur choreographer with 30 years of dance experience.

"I came up with the idea to organize a folk dance group when some of my friends were looking for a dancing class," Wang said. "Lessons can be too expensive, and I wanted to teach folk dance in an open area where everyone could join."

Wang's groups initially drew crowds of 10 or less. Over the last six years it has grown to more than 300 people.

"It's a cheap way for retirees and office workers to get some exercise. Most agree it's more interesting than running on a treadmill," she said.

Monthly lessons cost 30 yuan, she said.

A 46-year-old woman surnamed Fu has been a member of the folk dance group for five years. Although she originally joined to lose weight, she stayed for the enjoyment.

"I'm not retired, but I keep coming here to stay young and meet people my own age," Fu said. Her group keeps its music as low as possible, as there are usually other dancers in the park.

For park management, the dancing groups have become a part of park culture. "So far we haven't received any complaints about the dancing groups," said a manager at Zizhuyuan Park who refused to be named.

The difference between battles and acceptance appears to hinge on location. Regulators have been discussing the possibility of enacting new rules to limit where China's dancing grannies can meet to prevent further conflicts.

Dress up your love

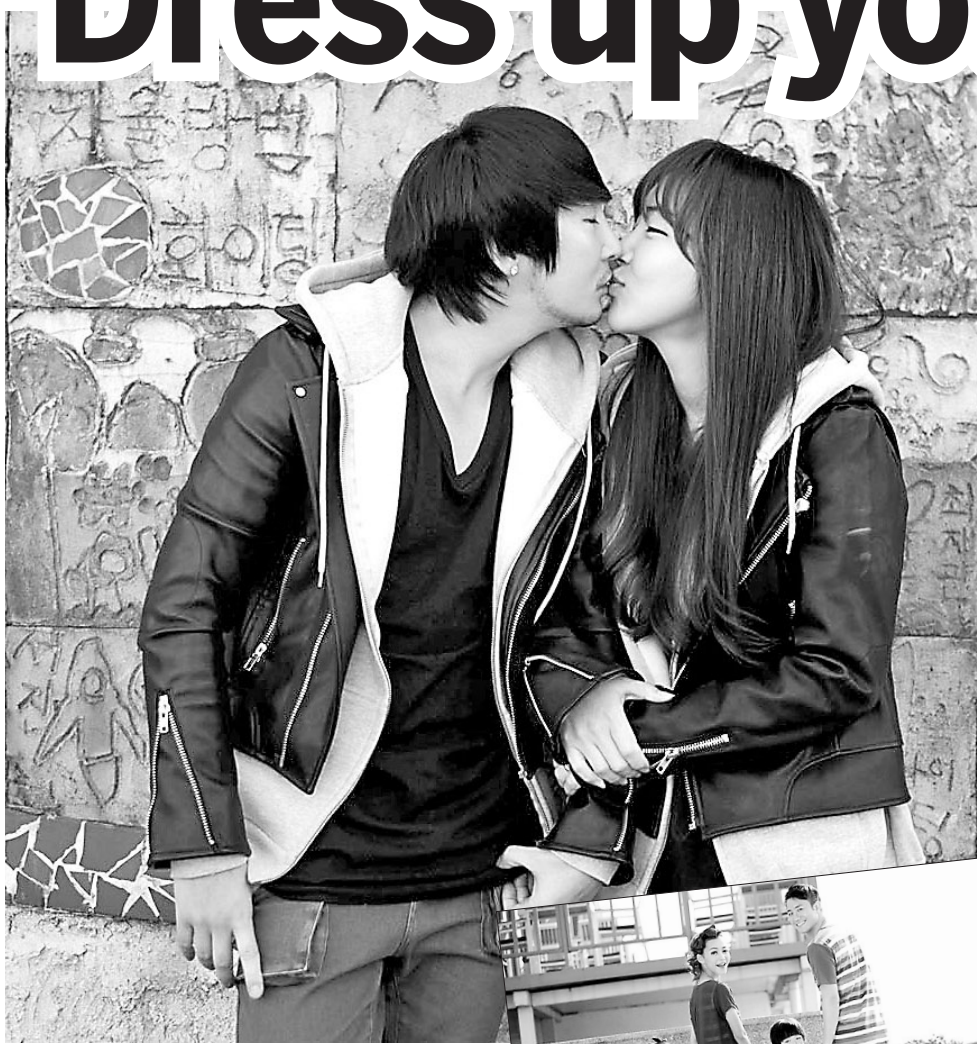


Photo by CFP



Pajamas

Photo by Zaihuni.com

By DIAO DIAO
Beijing Today Intern

Feel too embarrassed or shy to say "I love you"? Consider showing it instead.

With winter coats going back in the closet, now is the perfect time to show off how much you love your significant other with some couple's wear.

And we're not talking about lingerie.

Couple's wear has been increasingly popular in recent years as young Chinese look for euphemistic ways of expressing their feelings. His-and-hers matching clothes, shoes and watches are among the favorites.

While Taobao obviously offers the most options, the new online store Zaihuni.com makes the search a little easier. The website sells its clothes and accessories in pairs and updates its offerings each season. It also sells scarves, rings and cups.

For the ones who want to take this fad to its natural conclusion, it even sells matching clothes for the whole family.

We've picked out some of the best items on sale this week at Zaihuni.com.

White-'n'-Green Series

White and green are the colors of spring! His piece is a white T-shirt with candy green on the collar and trim. For her, there is a floral-pattern dress with a green Korean-style collar. The hint of green in white has the meaning of a new start.

Cost: 99 yuan (pieces sold separate)
Web: zaihuni.com/goods-1863.html

Pajamas

Popeye and Olive Oyl are one of China's favorite cartoon couples of the 1980s. The faces of the characters look even cuter in macaron pink for her and brown for him.

Cost: 196 yuan
Web: zaihuni.com/goods-2604.html

'1314' T-shirts

These T-shirts win attention with their numbers. While 13 may be unlucky in foreign eyes, in Chinese it takes on another meaning. The pronunciation of "1314" in Chinese sounds similar to "one's whole life," suggesting everlasting love. His shirt contains the 13 and hers the 14.

Cost: 216 yuan
Web: zaihuni.com/goods-2660.html

Contrasting Colors

By matching dark and light colors from opposite ends of the wheel, these sets present a brilliant visual harmony. Her dress has amber on the top while his T-shirt contains the contrasting navy blue. The choice of complementary colors speaks to the relationship between lovers.

Cost: 49 yuan (pieces sold separate)
Web: zaihuni.com/goods-1861.html

'Algebra' T-shirt

This T-shirt similarly makes use of contrasting colors with a transitional white between royal blue and lime. The four symbols at the top have an interesting metaphor. "Love plus love is more love, love minus love is original love, love multiplies by love is infinite love and love divided by love is just love."

Cost: 156 yuan
Web: zaihuni.com/goods-2763.html

Rainbow Family Set

It's a little unnerving to see parents and their children walking the street, hand-in-hand, wearing matching clothes. But for anyone brave enough to try, Zaihuni.com offers a rainbow-themed set. We'll pass on mentioning the other modern meaning of rainbows.

Cost: 90 yuan for his T-shirt, 120 yuan for her T-shirt and dress, 80 yuan for children's clothes
Web: zaihuni.com/goods-1702.html



White-'n'-Green Series



'1314' T-shirts



Rainbow Family Set



Contrasting Colors



'Algebra' T-shirt

Photos by Zaihuni.com

Meet the capital's cutest family restaurants!

By DIAO DIAO
Beijing Today Intern

Child-oriented restaurants can be a fun family outing. Although Beijing has no shortage of theme restaurants, these two are designed specially for kids.

Photos by Weibo.com



Hello Kitty Restaurant

Hello Kitty is Japan's most famous export. Created in 1974, the iconic character has neither a mouth nor facial expressions. Her image has been printed on almost every product imaginable and she's a perennial favorite of children — especially young girls.

Although there are Hello Kitty Restaurants all over the world, every operation takes a new and experimental approach.

In Taiwan, the restaurant is designed as a relaxing place for girls to enjoy afternoon tea. In Seoul, the Hello Kitty Cafe serves cat-shaped desserts and sells cat-shaped products.

Beijing's Hello Kitty Restaurant opened in 2011 and is the first officially

authorized Dreams Restaurant that serves Western food.

Dream Restaurant employs a team of international chefs to design new dishes for Asian consumers that are healthy, low-fat and chemical free.

Desserts are cat shaped, cups bear cat faces and every corner of the restaurant is packed with Hello Kitty imagery.

The price is a bit high, but the dining environment and food are worth it. It's a popular destination for both children and young women who may be a little too in touch with their inner child.

Where: F408 Shimao Shopping Mall, 3 Gongti Bei Lu, Chaoyang District
Tel: 8405 9021



Photos by Baidu.com



Buddy Bear Restaurant

Garfield fans be warned: these are not the Buddy Bears you are expecting!

Buddy Bear is a kid's restaurant with a family-friendly environment. In addition to a kid-oriented menu, the restaurant hosts magic performances by "Master Buddy Bear."

The restaurant provides a kids' kitchen where children can learn to bake cookies, a Story House where they can listen to fairytales and an edutainment center created by a Hong Kong designer.

Buddy Bear also hosts weekly activities such as cooking classes, toy bear design and a theme party.

The activities free up mom and dad so they can discuss what a handful their children are with other parents.

Decor is eye-catching and intended to inspire children, especially the colorful mushroom-shaped bar stools and big bear faces by the entrance.

Food in Buddy Bear Restaurant tends to focus more on nutrition and taste, with portions calculated by nutritionists to prevent your little ones from eating too much. Serving containers are colorful and come in interesting shapes.

Most of the waiters and waitress are graduates of education schools and have contributed to the restaurant's design.

Where: B14 Jinyuan Yansha Shopping Mall, 1 Yuanda Lu, Haidian District
Tel: 8889 5177

